

2025 JJ Birden Biography - Long Format

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A Small Man in a Big Man's Game

To appreciate the Hero's Journey that is JJ Birden's life, you must first know a few important facts:

- **Less than 6%** of high school seniors go on to play college football
- Of the 150,000 draft-eligible college football players, only 253 (**less than 1%**) are selected in the NFL draft
- The average NFL career is **less than 2 years**
- The average NFL player is **6'2, 245 lbs.**

The odds of making it to the NFL are staggering. The odds of staying in the NFL are even more amazing. The odds of doing both are the most astronomical of all when you're undersized and play one of the sport's most physical positions. Good thing JJ Birden never cared about the odds of success.

Despite being the #1 high school wide receiver in Oregon, JJ did not receive a single D1 scholarship offer. He was fast enough for sure, but at 5'9 and 133 lbs., JJ was just too small to play with the big boys. At least that's what the naysayers thought; JJ knew he was good enough, and he set his mind to achieving the impossible. All he needed was an opportunity, no matter how small, even if it meant making his own.

After receiving a scholarship to the University of Oregon for track & field, JJ earned a walk-on spot with the football team in his sophomore year. He was at the bottom of the depth chart and nowhere near seeing actual playing time on the field, but his coaches and teammates did not know how hard he was willing to work. It did not take long for them to find out: JJ became a starter the next season, his junior year.

But like all long-shot stories and underdog tales, JJ's trials were just beginning. The remainder of his college career was plagued with injuries and unimpressive stats. Still, JJ's speed and toughness were enough to earn him an invite to the NFL Combine, a yearly gathering of the top 300 college prospects in the nation. Unsurprising to his teammates, coaches, and fans, JJ dominated the Combine. His performance earned him the 216th pick in the 8th round of the 1988 NFL Draft. That's when the going got tough.

A series of injuries and failed physicals culminated in one of the darkest moments in JJ's early career, and one of the hardest weeks imaginable for anyone: JJ was rejected by 4 NFL teams in 5 days. He could have walked away from the game and given up hope in spite of what seemed like insurmountable odds, but JJ did not even flinch.

Instead, he did what he's always done when faced with adversity—he found a way to win.

JJ would go on to play 9 seasons in the NFL (remember, the average career is less than a quarter of that) despite never being the biggest, strongest or most physical guy on the field. What kept JJ on the field for almost a decade was not just how he played the game but rather how he approached every day like it was game day. JJ was willing to put in the work and do whatever it took to improve.

JJ is a best-selling author, entrepreneur, motivational speaker, and performance coach. Drawing from his NFL career and life experience, he teaches others how to overcome obstacles and execute when it counts. His new signature keynote, Beat the Coverage, equips audiences with the tools to thrive under pressure, stay disciplined, and win in business and life.

He's been married to his college sweetheart, Raina, for over 35 years, and together they've raised 8 children (3 biological and 5 nieces and nephews). JJ and his family live in the Phoenix area, where he continues to inspire others with his message of ownership, grit and growth.

2025 JJ Birden Biography - Short Format

Like a fabled long-shot story and underdog tale, JJ Birden was The Small Man in the Big Man's Game of Football.

After earning a scholarship to the University of Oregon for track and field (plus being the #1 high school wide receiver in Oregon), JJ also earned a walk-on spot with the football team his sophomore year. His trials were only just beginning though, and he was faced with many naysayers, followed by a cycle of injuries, and unimpressive stats.

JJ's hard work, grit, speed, and resiliency were enough to eventually earn him the invite to the NFL Combine, where he dominated. His performance earned him an NFL draft pick, and he was on his way, or so he thought. Another series of injuries and failed physicals culminated in one of the darkest moments in JJ's early career; JJ was rejected by 4 NFL teams in 5 days.

He could have walked away from the game and given up hope in spite of what seemed like insurmountable odds, but JJ did not even flinch. Instead, he did what he's always done when faced with adversity, he found a way to win.

Despite a height of only 5'10 and weighing in at 157 lbs. (versus the typical 6'2 and 245 lbs. of his peers) JJ would go on to play 9 seasons in the NFL, crushing the average player's career of less than 2 years.

He is now a dynamic keynote speaker and performance coach, helping individuals and teams overcome obstacles, stay focused under pressure, and take ownership of their success. As a best-selling author, entrepreneur, husband and father, JJ shares real-world lessons from his NFL career and personal life, proving that success isn't given, it's earned. Through his message, he inspires audiences of all backgrounds to rise, respond, and beat the coverage in every area of life.